

Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-13

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4423

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AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

S E C R E T BANGKOK 10131

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, TH

SUBJECT: SIGNALS RE RTG THINKING ABOUT US MILITARY PRESENCE

1. PRIME MINISTER THANOM' S LENGTHY REPLY TO JUNE 20 PRESS
QUERY ABOUT RTG INTENTIONS CONCERNING NEGOTIAIONS WITH UF
ON FUTURE US MILITARY PRESENCE HERE (BANGKOK 9567) WAS CLEARLY
PRE- PLANNED. WE BELIEVE IT WAS DESIGNED TO SERVE SEVERAL
PURPOSES: 1) TO REASSURE THAI PEOPLE THAT THAI LEADERS INTEND
TO ASSERT MASTERY IN THEIR OWN HOUSE, 2) TO TAKE SOME OF THE
THUNDER AWAY FROM RTG CRITICS SUCH AS THANAT, AND 3) TO SIGNAL
US THAT RTG IS REASSESSING JUST WHERE ITS INTERESTS LIE IN
RELATIONSHIP TO US MILITARY PRESENCE. THIS MESSAGE SETS FORTH
OUR CURRENT VIEWS ON WHAT WE THINK RTG IS SIGNALLING US AND WHY.

2. BASICALLY, RTG LEADERSHIP IS TELLING US THAT THEY ARE MAKING
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FRESH ASSESSMENT OF HOW BEST TO ASSERT THAI INTERESTS IN LIGHT OF UNCERTAIN OUTLOOK IN NEIGHBORING INDOCHINA COUNTRIES, CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS TO RESTRICT US MILITARY OPTIONS IN THIS AREA, REDUCTIONS OF BOTH SECURITY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, DOMESTIC QUESTIONING IN THAILAND OF ADVISABILITY OF QRMITTING CONTINUED US MILITARY PRESENCE, AND EVOLUTION OF THAI CONTACTS WITH PEKING AND HANOI.

3. CLEAR IMPLICATION IS THAT THAIS INTEND AS MINIMUM TO DEMAND HIGHER PRICE FOR PERMITTING CONTINUED US MILITARY PRESENCE. THIS INTENTION HAS ALREADY MANIFESTED ITSELF IN INCREASED PRESSURED ON US TO SHIFT US MILITARY CONTRACTS FROM AMERICAN TO THAI FIRMS. THE OBJECTIVE HERE IN PART IS TO MAKE UP FOR REDUCED AID BY REQUIRING US TO PUT MORE INTO THE THAI ECONOMY. THE RTG IS ALSO QUITE CONSCIOUS THAT SHIFT OF CONTRACTS FROM TAX- EXEMPT AMERICAN FIRMS TO THAI FIRMS WILL INCREASE THAI TAX REVENUES.

4. WE HAVE ALSO HAD VARIOUS SIGNALS THAT RTG INTENDS TO BE LESS LIBERAL IN RESPONDING TO OUR REQUESTS EVEN WHERE THERE IS NO EVIDENT DIRECT FINANCIAL BNEFIT FOR THAILAND. EXAMPLES ARE DENIAL T DATE OF FORMAL WRITTEN APPROVAL FOR TRANSFER OF USSAG JCRC TO THAILAND, DENIAL OF PRESS VISITS TO JCRC, ANNOUNCED INTENTIONS TO TIGHTEN UP ON PX AND OTHER MILITARY ACTIVITIES WHICH ENJOY DUTY- FREE IMPORT PRIVILEGES, SLOWNESS IN ACTING ON REQUESTS FOR TRAINING RANGES, ETC.

5. SUPREME COMMAND IS ALREADY NEGOTIATING WITH US ON MILITARY CONTRACTS AND HAS REQUESTED EARLY BRIEFING ON PX/ APO AND OTHER DUTY- FREE OPERATIONS. WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS SAY THAT THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN INSTRUCTED TO ENTER INTO BROADER NEGOTIATIONS RE NATURE AND EXTENT OF US MILITARY PRESENCE WHICH MAY BE PERMITTED, BUT WE KNOW THAT THEY ARE UNDERTAKING VARIOUD ANALYTICAL STUDIES WHICH COULD BE POINTED IN THAT DIRECTION.

6. IF CONGRESS SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTIVELY PROHIBITING COMBAT AIR OPERATIONS OVER LAOS AND CAMBODIA BEFORE SOME TOLERABLE DEGREE OF STABILITY IS ESTABLISHED THERE, MUCH OF THE RTG RATIONALE FOR DEFENDING OUR MILITARY PRESENCE HERE WILL DISAPPEAR. THIS WILL BE EVEN MORE THE CASE IF CONGRESSIONAL PROHIBITIONS SHOULD
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EXTEND TO ALL OF INDOCHINA.
IN EITHER SITUATION, OUR CONCERN SHOULD BE TO TAKE POSITIVE INITIATIVE
WITH THAIS BEFORE THEY COME FORWARD WITH THEIR OWN DEMANDS. IN BANGKOK 9571 WE HAVE ALREADY DISCUSSED ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS WITH REGARD
TO MAINTAINING SOME MILITARY INTELLIGENCE PRESENCE. WE THINK

SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS APPLY IN SEEKING THAI CONCURRENCE IN
WHATEVER LONGER TERM MILITARY PRESENCE WE MAY WISH TO MAINTAIN
HERE IN SUPPORT OF OUR STRATEGIC INTERESTS THROUGHOUT THE AREA.
MASTERS

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